

THE GRAMMATICAL BASIS OF NĀGĀRJUNA'S ARGUMENTS
SOME FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS **

In Nāgārjuna's philosophy there is something that is attractive to the modern mind. But attempts to explain the technicalities of that philosophy in terms of Western philosophy seem to indicate a dangerous trend that may result in a misrepresentation of that philosophy.

In a paper read at the 2nd Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies held at Nalanda in January 1980¹, I tried to point out, in the light of Candrakīrti's commentary *Prasannapadā*, the « grammatical basis » of Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion contained in the second chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*-s. The importance of these arguments will be seen from the fact that Nāgārjuna uses them as a model for other arguments in other chapters.

It is true — so far as I am aware — that the other commentators (whose works, unfortunately, are preserved only in Tibetan and Chinese translations, the Sanskrit originals being, it seems, irretrievably lost) do not emphasize this orientation of Nāgārjuna. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that there was a great deal of divergence in the Indian, Tibetan and Chinese traditions concerning the interpretation of this chapter². In these circumstances, it may be objected that Candrakīrti, coming several centuries after the Master and following the drift

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1. *A Corpus of India Studies: Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri*, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 85-95.

2. Cf. MUSASHI TACHIKAWA, *A Study of Buddhapālita's Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti*, in « The Journal of the Faculty of Literature », Nagoya University, LXIII, Philosophy 21 (March 1974), pp. 1 ff. (Only the first part of this study — « to be continued » — has been available to me).

of his time, is misrepresenting, himself, Nāgārjuna's thought by foisting upon his words a grammatical meaning which they possibly do not have.

Although I feel that Candrakīrti's interpretation is more satisfactory than any other interpretation which I have been able to see through translations in modern European languages of the Tibetan and Chinese translations of the commentaries mentioned above, I will not insist on this point. What I would emphasize, rather, is that Candrakīrti's interpretation itself has been misunderstood by his modern interpreters. My purpose, therefore, is here to interpret Candrakīrti rather than Nāgārjuna himself.

There is a great deal of interest today in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*. The text needs a new edition. But, unless sufficient attention is given to the grammatical questions dealt with by Candrakīrti, this new edition will not be altogether free from blemishes — not to speak of the new translation which the *Prasannapadā* needs also. Thus, in his commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* II, 6, Candrakīrti states: ... *nai-vam. śaktir hi kārako na dravyam. kriyābhedāc ca tatsāadhanasyāpi śakteḥ siddha eva bhedaḥ. na hi sthitikriyayā vaktā syāt. dravyam ekam iti cet, bhavatv evam, na tu dravyam kārakaḥ. kiṃ tarhi? śaktiḥ. sā ca bhidyata eva*. As I have shown in my paper referred to above, the point raised here is a point of Grammar: following Bhartṛhari's terminology (the idea, however, was prevalent long before Bhartṛhari, at least when Patañjali wrote his *Mahābhāṣya*, if it did not originate with Pāṇini himself), Candrakīrti teaches his opponent that what is understood in Grammar by *kāraka* or *sādhana* « means to bring about an action » is not a fixed substance (*dravya*) but a power or capacity (*śakti*, *sāmarthya*) which resides in a thing and which is diversified because of the diversity of the actions. Professor Jacques May's interpretation of the term *śakti* used in this passage, viz.: « Les Vaibhāṣika font une différence entre l'élément (*dharma*, *dravya*) en lui-même, sa nature réelle (*svabhāva*), et son "efficiency moment", sa fonction ou manifestation (*kāritra*, *lakṣaṇa*). Pour les Sautrāntika, l'élément, la substance, ne se distingue pas de l'activité (*kriyā*), de l'énergie (*śakti*) par laquelle il se manifeste. Les Mādhyamika adoptent cette opinion en vérité de surface (*saṃvṛti-satya*). L'agent n'est pas une substance tantôt en repos, tantôt affectée d'une activité extrinsèque; il est activité ou énergie »³, is quite irrelevant here. Candrakīrti, as the context — to which I am coming in while — shows, is speaking here in grammatical terms. There is, indeed, a striking parallel to this passage of the *Prasannapadā* in a grammatical treatise, in Jinendrabuddhi's *Nyāsa* on the *Kāśikāvṛtti*, which is a commentary on Pāṇini's Grammar: *na hi dravyam kārakam. kiṃ tarhi? śaktiḥ. sā ceha bhidyate*⁴. Now, in the *Prasannapadā* passage just quoted,

3. J. MAY, *Candrakīrti: Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti* (Paris, 1959), p. 59, n. 33 (cf. paper cited above, p. 88).

4. *Nyāsa* on *Kāśikā* on Pāṇini II, 3, 7 (cf. paper referred to above, n. 27).

where the word *kāraka* occurs twice, the manuscript preserved in Paris (Société Asiatique) gives, in the first place, the masculine *kārakaḥ*, but, a little farther in the same line, the neuter *kārakam*. In view of the grammatical theory being exposed in the passage, the neuter, of course, is naturally expected (*kāraka* in the technical sense is neuter in Grammar). As I have shown, we can manage, if need be, with the masculine also, without sacrificing the grammatical theory. But one wants to know what is the correct reading, and, for that purpose, all the manuscripts available should be consulted. Professor De Jong's *Textcritical Notes*, however, contain no indication on this point⁵.

Before I come to the subject which I propose to discuss today, I would like to summarize briefly — in the light of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* — the arguments contained in the first six *kārikā*-s of the second chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*-s, *kārikā*-s which are the most important in that chapter, for it is on their understanding that will depend that of much of the rest of the chapter. These arguments present themselves as follows. Motion (*gati*, *gamana*) cannot be conceived in relation to a road that has already been travelled (*gata*), nor in relation to a road that has not yet been travelled (*agata*): in the first one, motion has ceased, and in the second, it has not yet occurred. Motion can be conceived only in relation to a road that is being travelled at present (*gamyamāna*). But then, it is impossible to attribute motion to a road that is being travelled. It is because of a connection with the action of travelling (*gamikriyā*, says Candrakīrti) that we designate a road as « being travelled » (*gamyamāna*). There is no second action of travelling that can be coherently attributed to it. Or, one should suppose that in attributing the action of travelling to a road that is « being travelled », in the sentence *gamyamānaṃ gamyate* « [The road] that is being travelled is being travelled », one is using the verb *gamyate* « is being travelled » without there being any motion — which is absurd. In other words, one can only say *gamyamānam* « being travelled »; one cannot use the complete sentence: *gamyamānaṃ gamyate* « [The road] that is being travelled is being travelled ». Now, if it is supposed, for the sake of argument, that the connection with the action of travelling is in the finite verb *gamyate* « is being travelled », then there is no connection with the action of travelling in the participle *gamyamāna* « being travelled »; and we encounter the same absurdity as before: one would be designating a road as « being travelled » (*gamyamāna*) without there being any motion! Finally, it may be supposed that there is connection with the action of travelling in both *gamyamāna* « being travelled » and *gamyate* « is being travelled ». There are, then, two motions, one by virtue of which the road is designated as « being travelled », and the other that is attributed to that road, its locus (*adhiparāṇa*, says Candra-

5. J. W. DE JONG, *Textcritical Notes on the Prasannapadā*, in IJ, 20, 1978, pp. 25-59, 217-52.

kīrti), when it is said: *gamyamānaṃ gamyate* « [The road] that is being travelled is being travelled ». What harm is there if there are two motions? The harm is that, if there are two motions, then there should also be two agents of motion (*dvau gantārau prasajyete prasakte gamanadvaye: kārīkā* 6ab). « An action » — says Candrakīrti — « necessarily requires a means to bring it about (*sādhana*): the object (*karman*) or the agent (*karṭṛ*). Now the action of travelling also resides in an agent; therefore, it requires an agent of travelling (*ganṭṛ*) ». Candrakīrti refers here to the grammatical theory according to which the action denoted by a verbal root resides either in the agent (*karṭṛ*) or in the object (*karman*), and the verbal root *gam-* « to go, move, travel » is one of those which denote actions that reside in the agent (*karṭṛsthakriya*). There should be, then, two agents of motion if there are two motions. But we have only one agent in the case under consideration. The opponent, ignorant of Grammar, says that one agent can perform more than one action: for instance, when the same Devadatta, standing, speaks and sees. But Candrakīrti teaches him, in the passage quoted above, that *kāraka* is not a substance (*dravya*), but a power (*śakti*) which is diversified because of the diversity of the actions. In this way we can account for the fact that Devadatta performs simultaneously the actions of standing, of speaking and of seeing. Each of these actions has a different agent: it is not the substance Devadatta, which is the same in all these actions, but a power — each time different — that resides in him. When, however, Devadatta alone moves, there are not in him two powers which can account for the double action of moving implied in the sentence *gamyamānaṃ gamyate* « [The road] that is being travelled is being travelled ». There would be no difficulty if the two actions of moving or travelling referred to two different times; there would then be two powers in Devadatta, functioning as the agents of the actions of moving in two different times. But, in the instance under consideration, both the actions refer to the same time, the present. Hence the paradox.

So much for the first six *kārīkā*-s of the second chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārīkā*-s, according to Candrakīrti's commentary. The majority of the arguments contained in the rest of the chapter are just variants of these arguments. So, once these arguments are understood, it will be easy to understand the others.

Similar arguments will be used by Nāgārjuna, in other contexts, in the third and the seventh chapters of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārīkā*-s. But the eighth chapter is a continuation of the second; for the last two *kārīkā*-s of the second chapter are elucidated only in the eighth. This eighth chapter, entitled *Karmakāraparīkṣā*, has also posed a problem. I shall, therefore, discuss it briefly here.

The problem is with regard to the interpretation of the terms *karman* and *kāraka*. It is clear from the context that Nāgārjuna is here talking about « act » and « agent » in the moral sense. However, Candrakīrti interprets the terms in the grammatical sense. *Kāraka*, he says,

is the « agent » (*karṭṛ*: this term is also used by Nāgārjuna himself in the same chapter), the agent who is « independent » (*svatantra*). Candrakīrti thus refers to Pāṇini I, 4, 54, where the *karṭṛ*, one of the *kāraka*-s, « means to bring about an action », is defined as « independent » (*svatantraḥ karṭā*). Similarly, Candrakīrti interprets *karman* in the grammatical sense of *karma-kāraka*, and quotes Pāṇini I, 4, 49, where the *karman*, i.e. the « object », is defined as « that which the agent most wishes to reach (through his action) », *kartur īpsitatamaṃ karma*. What further complicates the matter is that as instances of *karman* « object » Candrakīrti himself cites things which are rather « acts » than « objects »: *ghaṭakaraṇa* « fabrication of a pot », *ānantaryakarmaṇ* « an act (a bad one) that finds retribution immediately ». I shall not discuss here Professor May's translation of this chapter nor his comments on this and that point. I shall rather translate the first three *kārikā*-s of this chapter along with Candrakīrti's commentary on them, and try to show how the entire thing holds together. The translation does not go without difficulty, for we have to deal with two values of the term *karman*: « act » and « object ». I propose to render, in Nāgārjuna's *kārikā*-s, the term *karman* by « act-object ». I do not think that there should be any objection to this procedure, for Nāgārjuna might well have had in mind both these values, while formulating his paradoxes.

I. *sadbhūtaḥ kārakaḥ karma sadbhūtaṃ na karoty ayam /
kārako nāpy asadbhūtaḥ karmāsadbhūtaṃ ihate //*

« This existent agent does not perform an existent act-object. Neither does a nonexistent agent aim at a nonexistent act-object ».

Candrakīrti:

tatra karotīti kārakaḥ kartā. kurvāṇasyaiva kiṃcīt kārakavyapadeśo nākurvāṇasya. tac ca karaṇaṃ sadbhūtasya vā kartuḥ parikalpyeta, asadbhūtasya vā, sadasadbhūtasya vā. kriyā itī karma, kartur īpsitatamaṃ⁶. tad api trividham: sadbhūtaṃ asadbhūtaṃ sadasadbhūtaṃ ca. tatra sadbhūtaḥ kārakaḥ kriyāyuktaḥ sadbhūtaṃ kriyāyuktaṃ karma na karotīty ekā pratijñā. idānīm asadbhūto 'pi kriyārahito 'sadbhūtaṃ kriyārahitaṃ karma na karotīty aparā pratijñā.

« Of these, *kāraka* means *karṭṛ* "agent", by virtue of the etymology "... does" (*karoti*)⁷. It is with regard to somebody doing something that one uses the designation "agent", not with regard to somebody who does not do anything. And that doing would be conceived either with regard to an agent who is existent, or with regard to an agent who is nonexistent, or with regard to an agent who is both existent and nonexistent. The word *karman* is derived through the etymology "... is

6. Thus read, instead of *kartarīpsitatamaṃ*, as printed in L. de La Vallée Poussin's edition.

7. Cf. Pāṇini III, 1, 133 (*ṇvultṛcau*) & III, 4, 67 (*kartari kṛt*).

done" (*kriyate*)⁸. It means "that which the agent most wishes to reach" (*kartur īpsitatamam*)⁹. That also is of three kinds: existent, nonexistent, existent-nonexistent. Now, one proposition is: An existent agent, i.e. an agent endowed with action (*kriyā*), does not accomplish an existent object, i.e. an object endowed with action (*kriyā*). And another proposition is: Also, a nonexistent agent, i.e. an agent bereft of action, does not accomplish a nonexistent object, i.e. an object bereft of action".

Candrakīrti:

tatrādyāṃ prasādhayitukāma āha:

« Desirous of demonstrating the first of these [propositions], [the Master] says »:

IIab. *sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti karma ca syād akartṛkaṃ /*

« An existent [agent] does not have any action, and the act-object would be without an agent ».

Candrakīrti:

kriyānibandhanatvāt kārakavyapadeśasya karotikriyāyukta¹⁰ eva kaścit sadbhūtaḥ kārakavyapadeśaṃ labhate, tataś ca tasyaivaṃvidhasya kriyāhetukalabdhakārakavyapadeśasyāparā kriyā nāsti yayā karma kuryāt. kriyābhāvāc ca yadā kārakaḥ karma na karoti tadā kārakanirapekṣaṃ akartṛkaṃ karma syāt. na cākartṛkaṃ karma sambhavati vandhyāsūnor iva ghaṭakaraṇaṃ iti. evaṃ tāvat sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti karma ca syād akartṛkaṃ iti doṣaprasaṅgāt sadbhūtaḥ kārakaḥ karma na karoti.

« Since the designation *kāraka* ("means to bring about an action")¹¹ has for its cause the action (*kriyā*), it is somebody existent, i.e. endowed with the action of doing (*karotikriyāyukta*), who receives the designation "agent". And for that reason, such a person, who has received the designation "agent" because of the action (*kriyā*), does not have another action through which he would accomplish the object. And when the agent does not accomplish an object because of the absence of action, the object, independent of an agent, would be without an agent. But an object without an agent is an impossibility, like the fabrication of a pot by the son of a barren woman. Thus, then, because the fault arises, viz.

"An existent [agent] does not have any action, and the act-object would be without an agent",

an existent agent does not accomplish an object ».

This argument reminds us of the arguments of the second chapter, for instance: It is by virtue of the action of moving that a « mover »

8. *Uṇādisūtra* IV, 144 (*Siddhāntakaumudī*, 584) [*sarvadhātubhyo manin*].

9. *Pāṇini* I, 4, 49 (cf. p. 39 above).

10. Thus read, instead of *karoti kriyāyukta*, in L. de La Vallée Poussin's edition.

11. *Kāraka* here is used in the technical sense. Cf. p. 42 below, commentary on *kārikā* III.

(*gantr*) is called « mover »; there is no second action of moving in him by virtue of which one could say: « The mover moves » (*gantā gacchatī*) [II, 9-10].

Candrakīrti proceeds:

idānīṃ sadbhūtaṃ api karma kāraṇa na karotīti pratipādayann āha:

« Now [the Master,] establishing that the agent does not also accomplish an existent object, says »:

IIcd. *sadbhūtasya kriyā nāsti kartā ca syād akarmakaḥ //*

« An existent [act-object] does not have any action, and the agent would be without an act-object ».

Candrakīrti:

sadbhūtaṃ nāma karma kriyāyuktam. tasyedānīṃ kriyānibandhana-labdhakarmavyapadeśasyāparā kriyā nāsti yayā karma kriyete. evaṃ tāvāt sadbhūtasya karmaṇaḥ kriyā nāsti. yadā nāsty aparā¹² kriyā tadā kāraṇa tat sadbhūtaṃ karma naiva karoti. yadā ca na karoti karmaṇo dvitīyakriyābhāvāt, tadākarmaka evāvidyamānakarmaka eva tasya karmaṇaḥ kāraṇaḥ syāt. na caitad yuktam. na hy akṛtānantaryakarmaṇa ānantaryakarmakāratvaṃ dṛṣṭam iti.

« An existent object, indeed, is that which is endowed with an action. Now that entity, which has received the designation "object" because of the action, does not have another action through which the object would be accomplished. Thus, then, an existent object has no action. When there is no other action, the agent does not, indeed, accomplish that existent object. And when he does not accomplish [the object] because of the fact that the object has no second action, the agent of that object would indeed be without an object, i.e. an agent whose object does not exist. This, however, is not reasonable; for it is against experience that one who has not performed an [evil] act that finds immediate retribution be the agent of an [evil] act that finds immediate retribution ».

evaṃ sadbhūtaḥ kāraṇaḥ sadbhūtaṃ karma na karotīti saṃsādhya-dānīṃ yathāsadbhūtaṃ api karmāsadbhūtaḥ kāraṇa na karoti tathā pratipādayann āha:

« Having thus demonstrated that an existent agent does not accomplish an existent object, [the Master] now, establishing how also a non-existent agent does not accomplish a nonexistent object, says »:

III. *karoti yady asadbhūto 'sadbhūtaṃ karma kāraṇaḥ /
ahetukaṃ bhavet karma kartā cāhetuko bhavet /*

12. For the reading cf. J. W. DE JONG, *Textcritical Notes...*, III, 20, 1978, p. 47.

« If a nonexistent agent performs a nonexistent act-object, the act-object would be without cause, and the agent also would be without cause ».

Candrakīrti:

*asadbhūtaḥ kārako yaḥ kriyārahitaḥ. kriyā ca kārakavyapadeśe
hetur iti kriyārahitaḥ kārako 'pi nirhetukaḥ syāt, karmāpy asadbhū-
taṃ nirhetukaṃ syāt.*

« That agent is nonexistent who is bereft of action. Action, however, is the cause of the designation *kāraka* ("means to bring about an action")¹³; so the agent, bereft of action, would be without cause, and the nonexistent object also would be without cause ».

For our present purpose, it is not necessary to proceed further and see how Nāgārjuna refutes the other theses, viz.: An existent-nonexistent agent does not accomplish an existent-nonexistent act-object; An existent agent does not accomplish a nonexistent act-object; A nonexistent agent does not accomplish an existent act-object, and so on. There is no incongruity in Candrakīrti's commentary. An act also can become the grammatical « object » (*karman*) — « that which the agent most wishes to reach (through his action) » — in such sentences as *ghāṭakaraṇaṃ karoti* « ... does the fabrication of a pot », *ānantaryakarma karoti* « ... performs an [evil] act that finds immediate retribution ».

In Grammar, the *kāraka*-s (« means to bring about an action ») — the « agent » (*kartr*), the « object » (*karman*), and so on — are conceived in relation to an action (*kriyā*). That is the concept which is exploited by Candrakīrti — and, perhaps, by Nāgārjuna himself — to discredit the belief in the intrinsic reality of the « agent » and the « act », the « mover » and « motion », and so on — the belief in their intrinsic reality alone, for Nāgārjuna does admit them as relative: as he states at the end of the eighth chapter, the « agent » and the « act-object » are established only through the *pratītyasamutpāda* relation, and all other things are to be considered in the light of what has been said with regard to the « agent » and the « act-object » (*karmakartr̥bhyāṃ śeṣān bhāvān vibhāvayet*).

It should be borne in mind, however, that although the Mādhyamika uses the Grammarian's concepts to serve his dialectical needs, he is open to criticism from the Grammarian's own side. The Grammarian would say that the Mādhyamika is unduly mixing up facts of language with ontological considerations which are foreign to them: these facts are explained, not, as the Mādhyamika assumes or feigns to assume, with reference to the « external being » (*bāhyasattā*) or « primary being » (*mukhyasattā*) of the things, but only with reference to their « superimposed being » (*aupacārikī sattā* or *upacārasattā*) which is conceived and externally projected by the mind of the speaker and the hearer.

13. Cf. n. 11 above.

It is this being, which exists in the mind alone (*buddhisattā*), that is the ground of all verbal behaviour. « The meaning of a word never deviates from being » (*na sattām padārtho vyabhicarati*), said already Patañjali¹⁴, and, according to Bhartṛhari¹⁵ and the later tradition¹⁶, it is this « superimposed being » that he had in mind.

A modest attempt has been made in this paper to understand what the Mādhyamika actually says, so that he may be judged on his own ground.

14. *Mahābhāṣya* on Pāṇini V, 2, 94.

15. *Vākyapadīya* III, 3 (*Sambandhasamuddheśa*), 51, in K. A. Subramania Iyer's edition with Helārāja's commentary (Poona, 1963).

16. Cf. Kaiyaṭa on *Mahābhāṣya*, *loc. cit.* (Nirṇayasāgar Press edition of PATAÑJALI'S *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*, with KAIYAṬA'S *Pradīpa*, and NĀGEŚA'S *Uddyota*, Vol. IV, Bombay, 1942, p. 341).